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ABSTRACT

The concept of accountability held by the Florida Department of Education is discussed. Their concept places a premium on clear thinking regarding educational values, on open communication between the public and the professionals, and on explanation of the manner in which resources available are used. The distinctions and relationships among the three concepts of accountability, responsibility, and authority are discussed. The purpose of accountability is said to be to assure relevant information for decision making. The allocation of resources is continually re-examined, using student growth compared with educational purposes as the guide. The Educational Accountability Act of 1971 of Florida has five major thrusts: (1) the development and implementation of education assessment procedures; (2) the establishment of educational accountability in the public school system; (3) assurance that education programs in the state lead to the attainment of established objectives for education; (4) the provision of information for accurate analysis of the costs associated with public education programs; and (5) the provision of information for analysis of differential effectiveness of instructional programs. (DB)

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HUMANISM AND ACCOUNTABILITY: CAN WE HAVE BOTH?

The title of this symposium asks whether a marriage between humanism and accountability is possible. I will respond by saying that such a marriage is not only possible, it is exceedingly natural. However, such a marriage is essential.

If these remarks leave you skeptical, your skepticism is no doubt based on a concept of accountability which you find antagonistic to humanistic principles. I likewise have found much in accountability literature which chills the heart of the humanist.

However, my view of accountability — the one held by the Florida Department of Education — is one which extends a hand of welcome to humanistic values. It invites humanists to articulate their beliefs about education and to incorporate these beliefs into educational planning.

Our concept of accountability places a premium on clear thinking regarding educational values. We want educators and their constituents to explore deeply the goals toward which they are striving. We want to look at meanings, values — the essence of the educational process. We want this to occur in every county, in every community, in every classroom, and in every family. We expect educational purposes to differ — between counties, schools, between classrooms, between families, between individuals. We also expect purposes and goals to change continually. As we think about accountability, we are convinced that a continuous focus on the purposes of education is the key to a viable education system for the State and for each individual learner. I am sure that humanists welcome such a focus.

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Recent efforts to describe purposes clearly have led to a major problem which the humanists face with the accountability movement. I am referring to the efforts to state educational purposes in the form of performance objectives (or behavioral objectives). Many humanists have found the objectives proposed to be unsatisfactory expressions of the educational purposes which they value. Moreover, many feel that the technical requirements for placing objectives in performance terms make it impossible to express a large portion of their educational goals. Because of the context in which it has been presented, many have considered accountability equivalent to the exclusive use of behavioral objectives. They have therefore concluded that a marriage between humanism and accountability is not possible.

In the Florida Department of Education, we believe that technical requirements are intended to support educational purposes, not to dictate the purposes. We endorse the use of performance objectives to the extent that they serve to state clearly the educational purposes of the State, the school districts, the schools, the teachers, and the individual learners. However, we recognize that there are many educational purposes which are more adequately stated in other terms. For example, some purposes may be best described in terms of the learner's experiences. Therefore, we encourage educators to describe their purposes in whatever terms are most applicable. Our main concern is that purposes be made clear so that educators and their publics can communicate. As a result, the desirability of the purposes can be weighed and the degree of success can be observed.

This leads to a second condition which we consider important in Florida. In addition to clear thinking about purposes, we want an open system. Our schools in Florida are established to serve the people, both individually and collectively. Therefore, we must have open communication between the public and the professionals who man the schools. We must make our purposes clear and explain our activities in terms of those purposes.

In an open system, information about purposes and methods flows freely. The wishes of students and the public are known. The purposes espoused by educators are known. There is communication between the educators, their students, and the public at large regarding educational programs and their purposes.

Our definition of accountability emphasizes such communication: We define accountability as, "the process of explaining the utilization of resources in terms of their contribution to the attainment of desired results." The "desired results" represent the purposes which schools are endeavoring to achieve. As stated earlier, these purposes may be set forth in whatever terms are most appropriate for a clear explication. In many cases, performance objectives may be the appropriate mode for description. In many other cases, an alternative mode is required. In no case, should technical requirements take precedence over substance in formulating statements of purpose.

There is another point in our definition of accountability which I would like to call to your attention. We say that accountability is a process of explaining. When one is accountable, he explains the utilization of resources in terms of their contribution to the attainment of desired results. Please note that being accountable does not mean that a given set of results is guaranteed. Nor does it mean that failure to achieve certain results carries with it certain automatic penalties. In the Florida Department of Education, when we talk about accountability we are talking about an obligation to explain one's actions -- in other words, to explain the manner in which he uses the resources available to him. This explanation is to be couched in terms of the relationship between these actions and the degree to which the purposes have been achieved.

The necessary pre-conditions for accountability are clear purposes and an open system. The purposes must be clear for they constitute the starting point in an explanation of resource utilization. Such an explanation constitutes accountability. The system must be open, allowing a free interchange of information; otherwise, an explanation cannot be made and true accountability is not possible.

In talking about accountability, there are some important distinctions and relationships which I feel are germane to this symposium. They relate to the concepts of accountability, responsibility, and authority. All three of these concepts are inextricably involved in the practical application of accountability.

Accountability is simply an obligation to report on the utilization of resources in terms of their contributions to the attainment of the desired results. Responsibility constitutes an obligation to take certain action or to achieve certain results. Authority consists of a prerogative or right to take specified action. Hence, limitations on authority automatically pose limits on responsibility. One cannot assume responsibility for accomplishing any given purpose unless he has authority to take appropriate actions. One must have authority commensurate with his responsibilities.

The relationship between responsibility and accountability is somewhat different. Under our definition of accountability, one can be held accountable for -- that is, be required to explain -- various activities or outcomes for which he is not responsible. However, making one accountable -- requiring him to explain the use of resources in terms of their contributions to desired results -- does not subject him to criticism or penalties when desired results are not achieved unless he also was assigned the necessary responsibility and authority in deploying resources for achieving those results. The purpose of accountability is to assure relevant information for decision-making. Accountability does not justify after-the-fact criticism when certain results have not been achieved unless it was understood in advance by all parties that such results should be expected. Such an expectation, of course, requires that the persons accepting responsibility for achieving the desired results have the necessary authority to take the required actions.

We all know that education is a complex process. It is affected by what occurs in the home and in the community, as well as in the classroom. There are few desired outcomes of education for which a classroom teacher or any one individual can accept full responsibility, regardless of his authority. For this reason, Floyd Christian, Florida's Commissioner of Education, has said repeatedly that individual teachers cannot be evaluated in terms of their pupils' achievement.

It is not now, nor has it ever been, the policy of the State of Florida to use student test scores or other indices of student achievement to assess the performance of any individual other than the student himself. Nevertheless, we consider it very important that teachers, schools, school districts, and the State monitor the growth of students. This growth must be analyzed in terms of educational purposes as established by individual students, by teachers, by schools, by local school boards, and by the State Board of Education. Such analyses, which are carried out continually, must serve as the basis for allocating resources at all levels. Resources to be allocated include time (of teachers and students), space (in other words, facilities), materials, and personnel. The allocation of these resources must be continually re-examined, using student growth compared with educational purposes as the guide. Moreover, the entire process -- the explanation of the utilization of resources related to the attainment of desired results -- must be made public. This is accountability.

Several sections of the Florida Statutes bear on the question of accountability with the legal basis found in the Educational Accountability Act of 1971. This law has five major thrusts:

-The development and implementation of education assessment procedures.

-The establishment of educational accountability in the public school system of Florida.

-To assure that education programs operated in the public schools of Florida lead to the attainment of established objectives for education.

-To provide information for accurate analysis of the costs associated with public education programs.

-To provide information for analysis of differential effectiveness of instructional programs.

Our Florida law reaffirms the responsibility for the State Board of Education to adopt statewide educational objectives and requires the Commissioner of Education to administer statewide assessment and make a public report of results. It requires local school board to issue accountability reports, and requires the eventual

consolidation of state assessment objectives and accreditation standards.

Since the Florida Constitution assigns to local school boards the responsibility for operating Elementary and Secondary schools, the local boards must accept accountability for that aspect of education. In other words, local boards are expected to explain the utilization of resources in terms of their contribution to the attainment of desired results.

The role of the State is to provide general guidance and support to the districts -- guidance to see that minimum literacy standards are met, State manpower needs are addressed, and universal educational opportunities are provided -- support in the form of dollars for operations and technical or administrative assistance.

Under technical and administrative assistance, the Department of Education is making major efforts to provide local school districts with consultative services relating to accountability and the development of techniques for assessing costs, resource allocation, and pupil learning. Our consultative services are organized around comprehensive planning efforts by local school districts. In addition to consultative help, the Department provides developmental support for accountability through our Research and Development Section, Title III and other special R and D activities.

Finally, the Department is committed to provide information on the facts and conditions of education in Florida which is relevant, accurate, and comprehensive. I should add parenthetically that the Department of Education is undertaking an extensive program internally which will lead to greater accountability within our agency.

In Florida, we are striving for a State system of education which is fully accountable. We are willing to discuss educational purposes with students, with parents, with the business community, with the State legislator -- in short, with all who have a vested interest in a viable system of education for the public.

We are striving to make our educational purposes -- in the classroom, at the school level, at the district level, and at the State level -- as clear as they can possibly be. We are striving to make decisions on resource allocation by comparing student growth with educational purposes. We are striving to provide clear explanations -- at the State level, the district level, the school level, and the classroom level -- of our allocation of resources. We do not intend to make scapegoats of parents, students, teachers, principals, superintendents, school boards, the State Board of Education, the State legislator, or society in general. We are confident that all of these groups are sincere in their efforts to make a better life. We see the accountability movement as an essential force in making education a better part of life.

Back to our question, "Is marriage possible between humanism and accountability?" This marriage is exceedingly natural. Moreover, it is essential. But the wedding must not be performed at the point of a shotgun. Members of the accountability clan and the humanism clan need to get to know each other -- to establish trust. They must capitalize on each others' strengths and help compensate for their weaknesses. They must stand together as educational decisions are made.